

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, CA
SUBJECT: QUEBEC GOVT TO LAUNCH REFORM OF PROVINCE'S LABOR CODE

1. QUEBEC MINISTER OF STATE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, PIERRE MAROIS, ANNOUNCED RECENTLY PQ GOVT'S INTENTION TO ADOPT, IN THE COURSE OF 1977, TWO SERIES OF MEASURES WHICH WILL GREATLY MODIFY THE WORKING CONDITIONS OF QUEBEC WAGE EARNERS. THESE INCLUDE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SET OF MINIMUM WORKING CONDITIONS, APPLICABLE TO ALL WAGE EARNERS, BUT DIRECTED MAINLY TO THOSE AFFECTED BY MINIMUM WAGE LAW. ALSO TO BE ADOPTED IS A NEW CODE TOUCHING JOB SAFETY. THE CODE, WHICH WILL BE MUCH TOUGHER THAN EXISTING LAWS IN PROTECTING WORKERS, WILL GIVE WORKERS POWER TO FORCE ADHERENCE TO LAW.

2. STATING THAT SOCIAL DISORDER OF LAST SEVERAL YEARS IN PROVINCE HAS NOT BEEN ALL FAULT OF UNIONS, MAROIS SAID IT WAS INCUMBENT UPON GOVT TO CORRECT INJUSTICES WHICH HE CLAIMS HAVE BEEN MAJOR CAUSE OF DISORDER. PROMINENT AMONG THESE, ACCORDING MAROIS, HAS BEEN LACK OF MEASURES DESIGNED TO PROTECT HEALTH AND SECURITY OF WORKERS. MAROIS CITED 1973 FIGURES WHICH INDICATE MORE WORK DAYS IN PRIVATE INDUSTRY LOST THROUGH ACCIDENTS
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THAN BECAUSE OF STRIKES.

3. MEASURES AFFECTING WORKING CONDITIONS ARE EXPECTED TO BE ADOPTED AS EARLY AS SPRING IN FORM OF NEW CHAPTER TO REFORMED LABOR CODE. ACCORDING MAROIS, THEY WILL FORM A SORT OF "BASE CONTRACT" WHICH WILL APPLY TO ALL WORKERS, UNIONIZED OR NOT. ONE NOTABLE MEASURE WILL BE A NEW REVISION TO

MINIMUM WAGE - ONLY RECENTLY RAISED TO 3.00 DOLS/HR. WITH INDEXATION TO COST OF LIVING. MAROIS INDICATED REVISED LABOR CODE ITSELF WILL FAVOR GREATER UNIONIZATION AND FORCE MORE EMPLOYER RESPECT FOR UNIONS. HE ADDED THAT "ANTI-SCAB" LAW PROMISED BY LABOR MINISTER JACPUES COUTURE WOULD BE INCLUDED IN CODE.

4. NEW CODE DEALING WITH JOB SAFETY TO BE ADOPTED IN FALL WILL FOLLOW COMPLETE REVISION OF EXISTANT LEGISLATION AFFECTING WORKERS' HEALTH AND SAFETY. NEW CODE, EXPECTED TO BE MUCH STRICTER THAN PRESENT LAWS, IS DESIGNED TO END "RITUAL SLAUGHTER" IN WORK-PLACE, ACCORDING MAROIS. NOVEL PROVISION OF NEW CODE WILL GIVE WORKERS AND NOT GOVT INSPECTORS AUTHORITY TO FORCE RESPECT FOR WORK CODE. ALTHOUGH HE PROVIDED NO DETAILS, MAROIS STATED WORKERS WOULD SOMEHOW BE EMPOWERED TO INSURE COMPLIANCE WITH LAW.

5. COMMENT: MAROIS' STATEMENT ON LABOR REFORM ARE AMONG FIRST HE HAS MADE SINCE ASSUMING OFFICE AS MEMBER OF PREMIER'S INNER CABINET CHARGED WITH SOCIAL AFFIARS. HE HAS REPUTATION AS ARDENT REFORMER AND DEFENDER OF WORKERS' AND CONSUMERS' RIGHTS. MORE IDEALOGICALLY ORIENTED THAN MOST OTHER SENIOR CABINET MEMBERS, HE IS ADOCAE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND IS CONSIDERED ONE OF PROGRESSIVES IN LEVESQUE CABINET. CONFLICT WITHIN CABINET IS LIKELY OCCUR SHOULD MAROIS AND OTHER SOCIAL REFORMERS ATTEMPT PUSH LEGISLATION WHICH WILL INCREASE LABOR COSTS IN MARGINAL INDUSTRIES SUCH AS TEXTILES, OR IMPLEMENT PROGRAMS WHICH WILL DEMAND SIZABLY INCREASED GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES. MAROIS SEEMS BE WARY OF THE DANGER AS HE TOLD ME RECENTLY THAT GOQ WILL HAVE TO PACE INCREASES IN SOCIAL EXPENDITURES TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EVOLUTIONARY INCREASES IN TAX REVENUES RATHER THAN RAISE TAX ON ALREADY HEAVILY BURDENED QUEBEC TAXPAYERS.
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